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4. White flannel films are typically nostalgic. They frequently center on adolescence or young adulthood and are set in British public schools.

5. Katie Mills ("Revitalizing") discusses the film in terms of the genre of the road movie.

1993



Movies and the New Economics of Blockbusters and Indies

CHUCK KLEINHANS

In the year the Clinton presidency began, New York's World Trade Center was attacked by Islamic fundamentalists exploding a truck bomb in the parking garage, and Michael Jackson was accused of pedophilic assault, making famous the "wacko Jacko" personality to which the tabloids had alluded for years. But these were surface phenomena compared to the surge of neoliberal economics as the driving force in international and national affairs and the increasingly globalized cinema industry.¹ Having beaten his predecessor by hammering at George H. W. Bush's stressed economy, Bill Clinton pressed for federal spending cuts combined with new taxes to reduce the massive deficit inherited from the Reagan-Bush era. Clinton's style of neoliberalism encouraged global trade while shortchanging traditional Democrat constituencies. With an eye on the official creation of the European Union as a rival trading bloc and on the phenomenal growth of East Asian "tiger" economies, the White House aggressively pushed the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), most favored nation status for China, and neoliberalized positions in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). France pushed back on GATT, gathering support for a "cultural exception" that resisted "free trade" in movies, to the supreme irritation of the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), which represents the six major studios. After aerospace, entertainment supplied the second largest U.S. export, at \$3.7 billion for the year. Add an aggressive financial and business environment that forced out executives who couldn't produce high returns in the short term (CEOs of IBM, Westinghouse, American Express, Apple, and Eastman Kodak quit), and the stage was set for an extended period of mergers, acquisitions, takeovers, and a bullish stock market, particularly in new technologies. Meanwhile, traditional manufacturing declined with outsourcing of production abroad. The Clinton administration promised that new high tech and service sector jobs would make up for job loss, but the actual policy was clearly set: the

economic gap between rich and poor, owners and workers, would grow at an unprecedented pace while the social safety net would be shredded.

In the wake of the Gulf War, Iraq agreed to United Nations weapons inspections, yet Clinton's initial foreign policy decisions were timid at best. Faced with Russian president Boris Yeltsin's increasing consolidation of power, the U.S. position seemed to be that it was better to have dictatorial stability than true democracy in the former USSR. Some modest material aid was sent to Bosnia, but no direct involvement in the former Yugoslavia was envisioned, particularly in the wake of the vicious slaughter of UN troops by Somalia's warlords, documented on TV. In a much publicized but historically meaningless photo op, Israel's prime minister Yitzhak Rabin and the Palestine Liberation Organization's Yasir Arafat shook hands on the White House lawn promising to work for progress, little of which was to occur in the subsequent fifteen years.

On the domestic front, the Clinton administration's plans were countered by an increasingly vocal and well organized opposition of Republican conservatives and the Christian Right. Their messages were amplified by an effective presence on talk radio, exemplified by opinion monger Rush Limbaugh and evangelist Dr. James Dobson. The growth of tabloid journalism on Fox television as well as the presence of influential cable TV ministers such as Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson furthered right-wing propaganda (Lesage and Kintz). Trailing longstanding rumors and accusations about sexual philandering, Clinton became a personalized focal point for those discrediting his policies. The most virulent issue erupted around an early executive order on gays in the military, articulating a "don't pursue, don't ask, don't tell" policy. Personal vituperation also focused on Hillary Rodham Clinton, particularly when she became the lead advocate for the administration's central domestic issue: expanding universal health care. An effective coalition of conservatives, insurance companies, physicians, the pharmaceutical industry, and big healthcare providers quickly made the proposal dead on arrival at Congress. A major police misstep led to the FBI killing more than seventy religious cult members in a stand-off near Waco, Texas.

In other news, the United States experienced a natural disaster with the Flood of 1993 inundating nine midwestern states. With the first cloning of human embryos, a new wave of contention began between science, ethics, and religion. The Nobel Prize in Literature went to Toni Morrison, while Broadway celebrated the appearance of Tony Kushner's *Angels in America*, examining the AIDS epidemic in the Reagan years. In popular music, country singer Garth Brooks became the top-selling artist of all time, while rap

hailed the major achievement of Dr. Dre's album *The Chronic* and grunge celebrated Nirvana's *In Utero* album. "Seinfeld" finally caught on and enjoyed extreme popularity on TV. In sports, the Chicago Bulls achieved an enviable third consecutive basketball championship, after which star Michael Jordan retired.

Understanding the cinema year demands accounting for the new mixed landscape for feature-length dramatic films: this was the first year that foreign theatrical gross exceeded domestic receipts, and pay-per-view, cablecast, and video rentals and sales became a very significant part of a film's gross. While first-week theatrical gross and total sales became news items, the actual income distribution for the MPAA studios reveals a variety of sources. About 16 percent of total income came from domestic (North American) theatrical receipts and the same amount came from international theatrical receipts. Domestic home video accounted for about 25 percent of income and international home video for about 19 percent. Domestic TV produced about 11 percent and licensing and merchandising produced about the same. The successive windows of release for the major studios became, in order, theatrical, home video, pay-per-view, pay cable, and broadcast and basic cable.

The film industry was going through major changes in its own efforts to tap into both global and expanded local trade.² Disney's acquisition of Miramax, the highly successful independent or "Sundance" distribution company, stood for the solidification of two distinct strata of theatrical film: the global mega-blockbuster (represented by the high-tech *Jurassic Park*) and the low-budget "indie" (*El Mariachi*). Concurrently, middle-budget films such as Martin Scorsese's adaptation of the Edith Wharton novel *The Age of Innocence* tended to founder, grossing only \$32 million domestically on a \$34 million production budget. These trends were compounded by rising revenues, due to higher ticket prices, the expansion of domestic screens,³ and increased revenue streams from overseas box office and video rental. The need for more "product" for expanding cable TV and direct-to-video (DTV) films opened opportunities for new, modest-budget "content providers."

For Hollywood, it was a boom year. The most important season, summer, brought in the highest box office ever: \$2.1 billion. Although theatrical receipts amounted to only 25 percent of revenue (compared to 80 percent in 1980), downstream revenue floated all boats to record highs. In the year after which five majors (Disney, TimeWarner, News Corp./Fox, Sony [Columbia/Tri-Star], and Paramount) saw annual profit increases of 60 percent, the last straggler, Matsushita/MCA/Universal, caught up due to

the unprecedented success of *Jurassic Park*. Each of the studios was part of a much larger media conglomerate, with Paramount acquired by Viacom this year. As opposed to the older model of entrepreneurial studios, film was now a small section of a vast corporation that expected steady and predictable profits matching other sections of the conglomerate. Increasing rationalization of the creative process and expansion of studio marketing efforts followed.

The summer dynamic was astonishing. Sylvester Stallone's action film *Cliffhanger* opened Memorial Day and grossed \$84 million as summer rolled on (\$255 million worldwide). The romantic Tom Hanks/Meg Ryan vehicle *Sleepless in Seattle* followed, making \$126.6 million (\$227.9 million worldwide) from a modest \$21 million budget and later picking up domestic video rentals of \$64.9 million. The 11 June opening of *Jurassic Park* swept away the season, with North American grosses of \$357 million (\$920.1 million worldwide). *In the Line of Fire*, a Clint Eastwood action film, followed on 9 July, racking up \$102.2 million domestically and \$85 million overseas, with rentals of an additional \$49 million. The next week, the kids/family film *Free Willy* opened, grossing \$77.7 million, eventually picking up rentals of \$36 million. Then the Harrison Ford action vehicle *The Fugitive* opened in August, making \$183.8 million (\$368.9 million worldwide) from a \$44 million budget and later taking in \$97 million in video rentals. Some films intended as summer blockbusters stumbled out of the gate, however: the Arnold Schwarzenegger *Last Action Hero*, made on a budget of \$85 million, grossed only \$50 million domestically, but later pulled in \$26.8 million in video rentals; *Super Mario Brothers*, with a budget of \$42 million, grossed only \$20.9 million in theatrical release. Top-grossing films of the year included the Robin Williams farce *Mrs. Doubtfire* (\$219.1 million; \$423.2 million worldwide), two John Grisham adaptations—*The Firm* (\$158.3 million; \$262.3 million worldwide), starring Tom Cruise in a tale of corporate law corruption, and another legal thriller, *The Pelican Brief* (\$100.6 million; \$195.3 million worldwide), with Julia Roberts and Denzel Washington—as well as the morality fantasy tale *Indecent Proposal* (\$106.6 million; \$266.6 million worldwide), headlined by Robert Redford and Demi Moore, and Spielberg's second hit of the year, *Schindler's List* (\$96 million; \$317.1 million worldwide).

A larger picture is useful here. During the year there were 450 theatrical releases and 19 reissues: 156 were from the majors (the six MPAA studios) and 275 were independent films; all these figures were up from the previous year. The MPAA actually rated 605 films (including foreign films and films that were rated but not shown theatrically). Of those the category

totals were as follows: G, 22; PG, 98; PG-13, 111; R, 370; NC-17/X, 4. This demonstrates the paucity of family-friendly films compared to the heavy output of sex and violence for teens and young adults. The major chain exhibitors do not show NC-17, nor do the chain video stores rent them, and thus the studio films *Kalifornia* (Brad Pitt as a sociopath killer in a road film) and John Woo's U.S. debut *Hard Target* (Jean-Claude Van Damme hunted and running for his life) were cut to get the R rating. Indie auteur Abel Ferrara kept the NC-17 for his *Bad Lieutenant*, with Harvey Keitel playing out the last days of a violent, drug-addicted cop.

The average cost of a studio feature was \$29.9 million, and the marketing average (prints and advertising) was \$14 million (a 4.5 percent increase over the year before; marketing had risen 224.9 percent in the previous ten years). Understanding this, one can see that a film that initially appears to be profitable, such as *Poetic Justice* starring Janet Jackson, which cost \$14 million to produce and returned a theatrical gross of \$27.5 million, actually just came close to breaking even when marketing is included.

On the other hand, very clever release and smart low-cost marketing could make a film profitable, as with Miramax's distribution of the 1992 Mexican film *Como Agua para Chocolate* (Like Water for Chocolate), which Harvey "Scissorhands" Weinstein recut for North America and released in February. It grossed \$21.6 million, a new record for a foreign film.⁴ Respectable profits also came to Miramax for the Australian comedy *Strictly Ballroom* (1992, released 1993; \$11.2 million), and this kind of savvy made the distributor attractive to Disney, which acquired Miramax in the spring. Miramax, in turn, got an infusion of capital and the deep pockets to steamroll over other independent distributors in subsequent bidding wars.⁵

In terms of exhibition, admissions grossed \$5.15 billion for the year. The National Association of Theater Owners marked admissions at \$1.24 billion (the MPAA computed ticket sales at \$1 billion) and reported the average ticket price at \$4.14 (MPAA quoted \$5.45), but New York City saw a spike from \$7.50 to \$8.00. The number of exhibition sites was slowly trending downward, at about 7,000 for the year, while the number of screens due to multiplexing was moving upward to 25,626.

The evolving media landscape heavily favored sheer entertainment films, but some serious message works were successful. *Schindler's List* came in tenth in gross receipts and topped almost all reviewers' best-of-year lists. Certainly Spielberg's Holocaust film is a sentimental favorite, but it has its legitimate critics ("White Male"), and, like the year's Tom Hanks vehicle directed by Jonathan Demme, *Philadelphia* (\$201.3 million theatrical worldwide), about a gay man with AIDS fighting for rights and dignity,

in retrospect it seems very much a film of its time, and evidence of the director's motivation to produce a serious statement against the backdrop of an extremely successful entertainment career.⁶

Within this economic framework, racial/ethnic representation also changed. Trailing the box office success of Spike Lee and "New Jack Cinema" earlier in the decade, black-directed and/or -themed films found a still uncertain but slightly more stable niche, complementing the rise and crossover of rap/hip-hop/gangster musical culture. The studios released the Hughes brothers' violent inner-city film *Menace II Society*, Mario Van Peebles's black western *Posse*, Tamra Davis's rap music mockumentary *CB4* with comedian Chris Rock, and John Singleton's romantic *Poetic Justice*, while on the indie side Miramax distributed first-timer Leslie Harris's neorealist *Just Another Girl on the I.R.T.* and Haile Gerima self-distributed his Afrocentric *Sankofa*. In a parallel vein, Anglo auteur Allison Anders finished her drama of East L.A. Chicano girl-gang members, *Mi Vida Loca* (My Crazy Life). Some parts of the cinema scene seemed to follow the theme song of the successful Clinton-Gore campaign of the previous year: Fleetwood Mac's "Don't Stop Thinking about Tomorrow."

The Dialectics of Blockbusters and Independents

The Hollywood system functionally connects blockbusters and indies. We can see the infrastructure at work in considering *Jurassic Park* and *El Mariachi* along with a "middle" film, *Falling Down*. On its June arrival, *Jurassic Park* was widely recognized as representing a new stage in U.S. cinema. It was certainly the quintessential summer blockbuster, quickly meeting and then exceeding all commercial expectations. The film fused two increasingly antagonistic commercial aspects: marketability and playability (Lewis "Following"). The studios hold a vested interest in marketing, promoting the film, and opening as widely as possible to maximize initial receipts (of which they typically get 90 percent), making it an event that will be remembered when later exhibition windows open. Exhibitors want films with a long play because they get a larger share of the gate with every passing week. Increasingly, theater owners complain that many event films don't maintain a good draw after the opening weekend. Meanwhile, studio insiders often admit that for many films the theatrical opening run serves just as a trailer for later sales. Spielberg's blockbuster bridged the gap.

The film used new technology, particularly in its mix of computer generated images (CGI) and advanced animatronics (modeling and puppetry). It continued and developed the pattern of the high-concept film (Wyatt

High Concept), a creative and marketing fusion that fueled the blockbuster direction of Hollywood since the mid-1970s. The creative team followed an established pattern, drawing on a best seller by Michael Crichton that recycled the theme park-gone-deadly from his earlier *Westworld* (1973) and added a hot new sci-fi topic: cloning. Director Spielberg had declared an interest before the book was completed. (His commitment probably helped shape the presold novel.) The narrative (monstrous nature threatens mankind) was one he exploited before in *Jaws* (1975), and it included his familiar theme of establishing/saving the nuclear family. George Lucas's effects house, Industrial Light and Magic, delivered an impressive new look. Thus the marketing team worked with preestablished material (perennial kids' interest in dinosaurs), a best-selling novel, and multiple opportunities for product tie-ins (toys, kids' fast-food meals, etc.).

With the previous decade's system of advance saturation advertising in place and a newer pattern of multi-screen cineplex premieres, the film had a spectacular opening weekend (earning back \$50.2 million of its \$63 million production cost in three days on 3,500 screens in 2,404 theaters). It quickly became the highest grossing film to date (\$882.1 million worldwide by the following March, with \$1 billion in licensed merchandise sales), a position it held until *Titanic* created a new benchmark five years later. Many critics noted the irony of a film that was ostensibly critical of capitalist exploitation of nature for profit producing extensive ancillary merchandise (the T-shirts and school lunch boxes sold at the Jurassic theme park being a sad marker of failure at the end of the film, with raptors raging in the welcome center). The merchandizing machine rolled on with logo-branded items flooding the kid market and product placement tie-in synergy such as the Ford Explorer SUVs incorporated into the film. (With crude oil prices a record low \$15 a barrel, what better way to protect your family from raging dinosaurs?) A few years later a Jurassic Park ride was incorporated into the Universal Studios theme park.

Jurassic Park fits the general constellation of attributes that industry analyst Edward Jay Epstein calls "The Midas Formula" of money-making megahit films.⁷ The storyline centers on a childhood fantasy (here humans interacting with dinosaurs) with (some) child/adolescent central characters. The plot moves protagonists from weakness to purpose, the cast has chaste sexual relations, and the film shows eccentric supporting characters. There is physical conflict but not so violent as to miss out on a PG-13 rating.⁸ Good triumphs over evil, allowing a happy ending and reconstituting the nuclear family. Digital effects and animatronics enhance the spectacle, and the actors are not expensive top-list stars.



Raptors destroy the welcome center in *Jurassic Park* (Steven Spielberg, Universal), marking the triumph of nature over human attempts to control and merchandise it. Digital frame enlargement.

The formula's existence and development merit explanation. With vertical integration gone (formerly studios had controlled not only finance and production but also distribution and exhibition by owning theaters), studios had to exploit intellectual properties in different markets and platforms over the long term. Disney had been the most successful model, rolling films into print comics, toys and tie-ins, and finally in the 1950s television and theme parks. For studios, the cash cow became TV, both made-for-TV movies and syndicated shows, not theatrical movies. Increasingly films were made with an eye to eventual release on other platforms: cable, video/DVD, broadcast TV, and then a new cycle abroad, contributing to the increasing conglomeration of the entertainment and media industry through the decade. Thus *Jurassic Park*, the theatrical movie, justified its financial investment through its popularity and box office receipts, but it also served as a starting point for a successful theme ride at Universal Studios theme park, a sequel, the branding of dinosaur-themed toys, and an arcade game (shoot the raging raptors with a "tranquilizer" gun), among other properties. It became the studio ideal: a "tent-pole franchise"—a center for sequels, computer games, and a surfeit of merchandise around the world.

The film presents an interesting amalgam that emerges most fundamentally from the commercial imperative Hollywood has always followed of producing works that are legible and satisfying to the largest audience.

We can spot at least three different authorial intentions in the finished product. For Universal executives, *Jurassic Park* exploits the Midas formula for maximum international commercial advantage. Becoming *the* summer event film in North America ensures global marketing success and sale in future downstream windows, as well as opening the possibilities for a sequel and a theme park attraction. For novelist and screenwriter Michael Crichton, the film is a platform for a critical skepticism to corporate capitalist enterprise: messing with nature through sci-fi biotechnology. And for Spielberg, it uses thrills aplenty to return to his familiar theme of validating the nuclear family.

Jurassic Park trades on the well-worn Frankenstein story of human hubris—driven here by entrepreneurial capitalist showmanship—defying God's plan and creating monsters. Motivated by compensation that will allow them to continue their fieldwork dig for another three years, a visiting paleontologist and paleobotanist, Alan Grant (Sam Neill) and Ellie Sattler (Laura Dern), arrive at the island park for one three-day weekend, ostensibly to verify its safety for prospective customers. After the initial science setup, explaining that the park contains live dinosaurs cloned from ancient DNA, things go awry and the desperate chase is on. Along the way Dr. Grant learns to shed his aversion to children and actually becomes a model parent. As Lester Friedman describes it:

Grant and the children take refuge in a giant tree for the night. Climbing astride a large tree branch jutting out between his legs, an apt if exaggerated symbol of his assumption of patriarchal control, Grant mimics the "singing" of the vegetarian brachiosaurs, as the soundtrack breaks into a gentle lullaby. "They're not monsters," he patiently explains to the frightened Lex. "Just animals. They do what they do." He climbs off the branch and sinks back into the trunk, exhausted. The children lean against him and, for a moment, Grant seems uneasy with their need for affection, reassurance, and protection. He expresses a bit of pain, uncomfortably shifts his weight, reaches into his back pocket, and extracts the raptor claw he used to scare the boy in Montana, silently contemplating the artifact. "What are you and Ellie going to do now if you don't have to pick up dinosaur bones anymore?" asks Lex. "I don't know," responds Grant. "Guess we'll just have to evolve too." . . . Grant takes one last look at the claw, a symbol of his hostility toward children, and throws it to the ground, sifting his focus from past enmities to present obligations. Spielberg restates this exact father/children configuration in the last scene, when the characters flee from the island, as Sattler smiles approvingly, and Grant, also with a shy smile, accepts his evolution to fatherhood. (139)

In a wide-ranging article on the film, Constance Balides deals with its fusion of a display of magical bioengineering and a critique of neoliberal

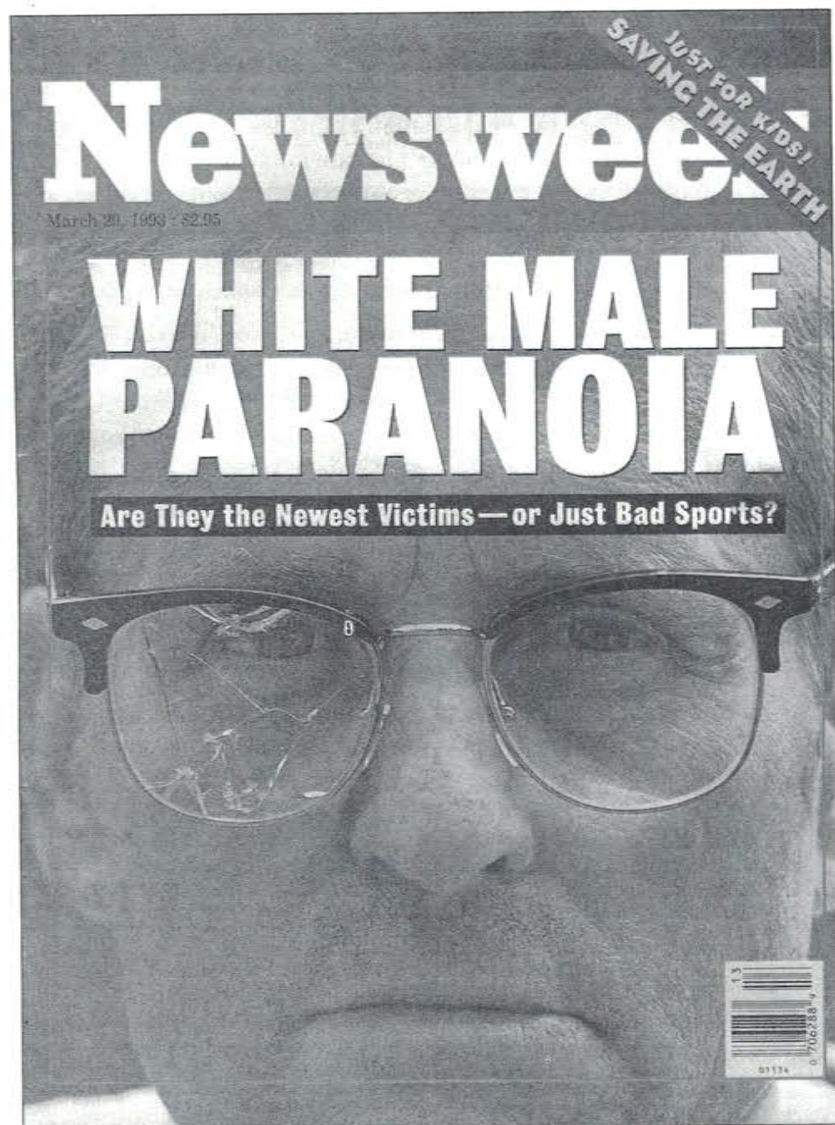
practices while itself becoming a marketing phenomenon: "*Jurassic Park's* project is hypervisible, not hidden—its own economics out there, on the surface and celebrating commercial success. . . . The film points to a present marked by the imbrication of economic and cultural realms and by pervasive identifications with economic rationales, and to the way the lustre of capital itself is an attraction in a post-Fordist economy" (160).⁹

At the opposite end from studio blockbuster status, filmmaker Robert Rodriguez, fresh from film school, intended to make an inexpensive feature for the Spanish-language home video market for under \$10,000. A clever and resourceful Texan, he knew that video stores throughout the Southwest and in urban areas with Chicano populations had a flourishing trade in low-budget action adventure features, commonly produced in Mexico. So becoming a "cockroach capitalist," he worked in the neglected interstices of the market, building up his skills and credits before trying the mainstream. By lucky accident, he was in the right place at the right time—U.S. producers who spotted his work on *El Mariachi* found it similar to the movies of newly discovered Hong Kong director John Woo, who had influenced Quentin Tarantino and others—and he subsequently parlayed this success into a major directing career. An early version of *El Mariachi* was shown at the 1992 Toronto Film Festival and a considerably upgraded version played at Sundance in January, winning the audience award and gaining sensational press and widespread attention.

El Mariachi introduces the title character as an itinerant musician (Carlos Gallardo) who enters a small, dry, dusty Mexican town looking for employment. Mistaken for a notorious gunman who also travels with a guitar case holding his weapons, the guitarist becomes embroiled in a criminal feud, emerging at the end, having lost his fingers and thus livelihood, as *El Mariachi*, the musician transformed into an avenging killer. The raw story has the simplicity of a folktale, the creation of a legend told in story and ballad. Multiplying fast action sequences, a romance plot, and both menacing and comic secondary characters, the film quickly covers its technical limitations with inventive short cuts and improvisations. By shooting just one take of each shot and working fast with a small crew, Rodriguez was able to transfer the film to video and rough-edit it on two VCRs. Full of energetic action, the film moves quickly while utilizing existing locations to clever effect and casting nonprofessionals whose unusual look is more important than their acting ability. The result is a satisfying, even intriguing, kinetic film experience, which shows that much of effective cinema depends on core elements of dramatic narrative and visual style that even a poverty-level budget can achieve given imaginative direction.

One much-hyped aspect of independent features—working on bare-bones budgets—is extremely misleading to the uninformed. It makes good copy to say someone shot their first feature on \$100,000 or \$25,000 or even \$7,000, but the realities are very different. Rodriguez gained a lot of attention for the claim that he made this first feature for \$7,000 in out-of-pocket expenses (Rodriguez). But this disguises numerous details. First of all, that figure covered only the initial outlay for film stock and processing. Rodriguez was "discovered" while in the editing stage of his film (actually while making a videotape rough version), and then signed to a deal that allowed him to finish editing and pay for the blow-up to 35 mm, the cost of optical effects (such as fades and dissolves), the remixing of all sound including extensive Foley (sound stage) work, payment for music rights, and other matters needed to bring the film to completion. Beyond that was the distributor's cost of prints, advertising, negotiating distribution and exhibition deals, and residual sales abroad, as well as cable TV and videocassette sales. The actual cost of the film was hundreds of thousands, perhaps several million, not a few thousand dollars. The myth of *El Mariachi* also omits that Rodriguez borrowed rather than rented his equipment, that he shot a type of film that did not require skilled physical acting or dialogue delivery or synch sound recording, and that he had made and edited little videotape "movies" at home as a teenager. So he actually had ten years of background and thousands of hours of shooting and editing experience with narratives before starting on this feature project. With a minuscule cast and crew, by editing his rough cut at cable access on video, and by living and working at home and thus having no office or overhead expenses, Rodriguez carried out the production and post-production with remarkable efficiency.

While *Jurassic Park* and *El Mariachi* represent the industrial extremes of the action film, both present an attractive masculinity: the preoccupied professional who learns the proper pleasures of fatherhood and family, and the itinerant artist who becomes the romantic loner and avenger. A "middle" film in budget also appeared as a contemporary allegory on white middle-class American masculinity. Perhaps the year's most historically located film, Joel Schumacher's *Falling Down* features Michael Douglas as a white-collar defense industry worker who violently rampages across Los Angeles, the leading popular image-location of urban violence. Known only as D-FENS to the police (from the vanity license of his abandoned auto), the Douglas character, under a restraining order to stay away from his divorced wife and children, has lost his aerospace engineering job (that year Boeing released 32,000 workers) and finally his grip on himself. The film encapsulates widespread social tensions of the time: high unemployment, loss of



Newsweek featured *Falling Down* (Joel Schumacher, Warner Bros.) in a cover story to illustrate changes in white masculinity. Digital frame enlargement.

the familial corporation that respected age and experience, large immigrant presence in urban areas, fear of feminism, escalating lawlessness from police and gangs. Newsweek featured the film on its cover with the headline: "White Male Paranoia: Are They the Newest Victims—or Just Bad Sports?"

While some read the film as an expression of white male anxieties, the film also underlines the paltriness of D-FENS's grasp of the world. He scapegoats minorities and is unwilling to understand the specific impact of the global neoliberal agenda on his own life. There is no release for him or the audience in his rampage. Arriving at a fast food restaurant minutes after the breakfast menu has ended, he uses a gun to get his morning food (providing a comic and audience-pleasing retort to retail bureaucracy), but while this confrontation overcomes the corporate rules of Taylorized food service, the payoff is only crappy fast food.

The Douglas character contrasts with that of Robert Duvall, who plays a methodical and dutiful police detective pursuing the enraged D-FENS. Due to retirement, it is the cop's last day on the job, and the film carefully matches the two to show a rampaging and resentful male anger contrasted to a mature, responsible, and socially sensitive masculinity. Against the recent historical backdrop of the O. J. Simpson murder trial, the Rodney King beating, and the urban rioting following the LAPD verdict the year before, *Falling Down* encapsulates social anxieties fresh in the national imagination. At the same time, industrial analysis reveals other aspects. Although a bankable star, Douglas found it hard to develop this pet project's finances, since it wasn't a generic action vehicle but a thoughtful allegory containing a cautionary message. The film produced a respectable domestic theatrical gross of \$40.9 million (37th highest for the year) followed by video rentals of \$18.1 million.

Family Dramas

While the high drama of global capitalism's public face often appears in the heroic action film with the lone protagonist or small team determined to fight transnational corporate corruption, international terrorism, or gangster plots, the daily small-scale symptoms often can be found in domestic melodrama. Two films present contrasting allegories of the effects of neoliberalism on personal life. *Laurel Avenue*—made by Carl Franklin and originally broadcast in the summer as a two-part series on HBO, then released on video as a film—realistically dramatizes an extended working-class, midwestern family facing the effects of social disintegration in the post-Vietnam, post-Reagan-Bush era. *The Wedding Banquet* [*Xiyan*]¹—directed by Taiwanese-born, U.S. film school-educated Ang Lee, co-produced in Taiwan and the United States—comically resolves the contradictory expectations of old and new ways in a Chinese (and) American family.

In its structure, *Laurel Avenue* bears traces of having been conceived as a mini-series that could run in six half-hour segments on pay cable, or three hour-long segments, or (as in its original screening) as two hour-and-a-half shows. This flexibility also indicates that it could have been thought of as pilot for an annual series like other HBO dramas. Such malleability is a plus in programming and marketing. Running against the grain of expectation, *Laurel Avenue* is notable as a family melodrama centered on a midwestern African American family. While the family melodrama has been declining in appeal as a film genre form, it has continued on television. Why it has declined in theatrical film form can be explained most obviously by box office demographics dominated by the young and by males, but that also points toward the logic of its continuation in domestic exhibition on TV.

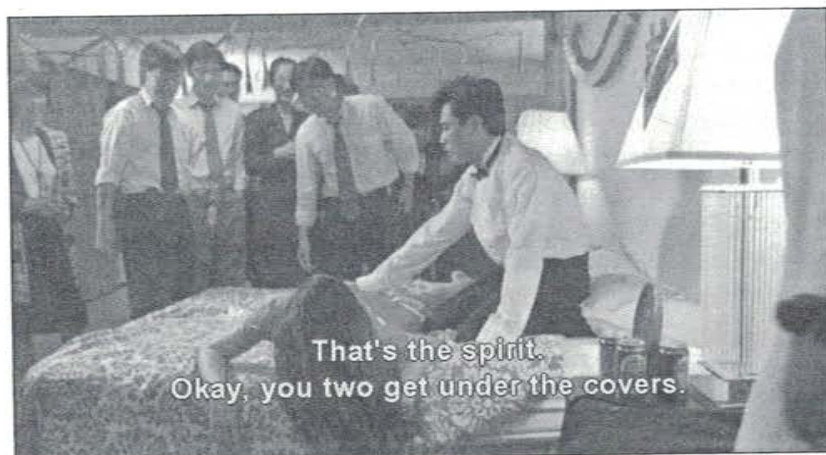
The film can be read as an allegory of the change to a post-Fordist economy. Set in St. Paul, Minnesota, the narrative unfolds in a multigenerational working-class family that is undergoing the primary and secondary effects of a drastically changing economy. Institutional context aside, *Laurel Avenue* shows the remarkable potential of the family drama precisely in showing the unexpectedly typical. A midwestern black family with a range of types, tensions, and traumas has to cope with a weekend of coalescing crises. Patriarch Jake Arnett (Mel Winkler) is a factory worker in a time of layoffs as production is outsourced abroad. His unionized employment was generous and stable, and its long tenure is evidenced by the large two-story frame house on an ample lot that serves as the magnet for diverse activities through a weekend. Matriarch Maggie (Mary Alice) tries to stage-manage the events. Her twin thirtysomething daughters from her first marriage face their own milestones: Yolanda (Juanita Jennings) is a cop being promoted to sergeant, while Rolanda (Rhonda Stubbins White) is a recovering drug addict who reverts to using and has to go back to rehab.¹⁰

Meanwhile, Woody (Dan Martin), Jake's son from his first marriage, a Vietnam vet who went through his own postwar addiction, tries to start up a career in music while Kathleen (Gay Thomas), his 3M corporate executive wife, wants him to take over her father's funeral home business so they can start having kids. Maggie and Jake's firstborn son, Marcus (Monté Russell), finds himself caught between working in a Mafia-owned clothing store and the schemes of an old army buddy who is trying to make a fast-buck deal on contraband steroids. Other plotlines involve the Arnett's sixteen-year-old daughter, Sheila (Malinda Williams), on the cusp of sexual activity (she carries condoms in her purse but hasn't used them) that leads to a moment of parental drama Saturday night and the instigation of Maggie's determined discussion with the preacher Sunday morning on the

church steps. Son Keith (Scott Lawrence) lives at home and serves as a high school basketball coach where his nephew Rushan (Vonte Sweet), Rolanda's son, is a basketball player and a petty dealer. A somewhat testy old uncle (Jay Brooks) lives in the Arnett home along with Rolanda's five-year-old daughter (Ondrea Shalbetter). The complex web of a large cast marks the film's origins in serial drama, but it also contributes to the story reflecting on the strengths of a black family faced with external pressures in changing times.

Much of the story progresses with low-key exposition. Jake and the uncle duck out of going to Sunday services and wager on the day's NFL football game. Keith has to pull Fletcher (Ulysses Zachary), Sheila's boyfriend, from a game when the boy's on-court performance is erratic in front of college scouts. Sheila is attracted to the boy (though not to his furtive drinking), but she is not willing to go as far as he wants on a date. Maggie frets about her cop daughter not taking a police desk job but staying on the street, and also notices, with disdain, that Woody brings store-bought potato salad—instead of Kathleen providing homemade—for the Sunday promotion party. We see one reason for the culinary *faux pas* when we find Woody going down on Kathleen before Sunday breakfast. This interweaving of the mundane and everyday with a few moments of high tension drama (the basketball game, the steroids deal) marks an unusual pace and a realistic attention to the dynamics of personal and family life that is so noticeable precisely because the dominant depiction of African American families on television and in film is based on sit-com simplicities or gang-banger stereotypes. The film chronicles hopes and disappointments, none of which are earthshaking, but which gradually reveal the strength of a family bound by responsibility and love. Keith hopes he can get Fletcher a basketball scholarship, but the kid fails. Sheila prepares for sexual activity, but realizes she's not ready. Yolanda faces the frustration of her junkie sibling, but finds strength from her white husband's support. Rolanda stumbles again, but her parents take her back to rehab one more time. Following a realist tone and low-key resolution, the film displays endurance as a social value in a time of large and small traumas.

Ang Lee's *The Wedding Banquet* (*Xiyan*) was a low-budget (\$1 million) indie success in the United States (\$6 million) and also in the Asian market (where it brought in a spectacular \$30 million). The film presents a series of mistaken identities built out of gay yuppie New York real estate developer Wai-tung's (Winston Chao) need to arrange a marriage of convenience to Wei-wei (May Chin), a mainland Chinese painter whose student visa is expiring. With his parents (Sihung Lung and Ah-Leh Gwa) arriving from



Wedding guests force the couple into bed in *The Wedding Banquet* (Ang Lee, Good Machine). Digital frame enlargement.

Taiwan, Wai-tung's white boyfriend Simon (Mitchell Lichtenstein) suggests the sham relation as a piece of theater for the parents. Once begun, things get out of hand when a former family servant, now a Chinatown restaurateur, insists on throwing a grand wedding banquet. The set piece dinner ends with two complications. Dad has a stroke and must stay on to recover, while Wei-wei is found to be pregnant from unplanned post-banquet intercourse.¹¹ In the final resolution the son comes out to his mother as gay, and the father reveals to Simon he knows his son is queer but is glad there will be a grandchild. Wei-wei gets a green card and the chance to stay on in a not-very-traditional family.

As a comedy of manners built out of the confused complexities of the characters' identities, the film highlights dynamic changes pointing to the future. Thus, distinctions such as PRC/Taiwan, Chinese/American, gay/straight, traditional/contemporary, core/periphery, aspiring artist/real estate businessman are all in dynamic play. Gina Marchetti argues that the film's commercial success stems from

a fundamental contradiction concerning its classification. . . . [It] fits easily into several categories, and therefore can be marketed to a variety of audiences as an Asian film, a Chinese film, a Taiwanese film, an Asian American film, a Chinese American film, a New York Chinatown film, a "green-card" story, a popular comedy, a melodrama, an "art" film, a gay film, an "ethnic" family film, or a "multi-cultural" feature designed to raise the consciousness of viewers. (276)

Chris Berry provides a further consideration, arguing that the comic film presents a Chinese family melodrama, depicting a collectivity in crisis, rather than individual character drama centered on psychology characteristic of the West. For Berry, audience empathy and identification focus less on any individual and more on the Confucian family unit embedded in social and kinship relations as it negotiates the interface with globally hegemonic American culture. In the Chinese framework, homosexuality is less a moral or sexual dilemma than an ethical one for the son who is expected to produce a grandson to continue the family line. This is set within a film in which the audience has access to the feelings of all the central characters and thus enables knowledge exceeding the perspective of any one character. Berry concludes:

The film's ambivalence is itself an ideological move appropriate to the sustenance of globalized liberal capitalism, for it enables that system by finding a way to maintain simultaneously two otherwise incompatible value systems that it brings into proximity. In this way it produces a new melodramatic hybrid appropriate to the negotiation of the "moral occult" of globalism. (189)

The Woman's Film

While being a staple form and thematic of feature dramatic narrative film, the newer woman's film undergoes significant changes evidenced in three different films this year. The large studio film *What's Love Got to Do with It* is a musical biopic about singer Tina Turner, detailing her rise to stardom and escape from the battering of her husband, Ike Turner. It alternates musical performance as expressive self-achievement with harrowing depictions of verbal, psychological, and physical abuse. A low-budget neorealist indie auteur film, *Ruby in Paradise*, shows a young woman coming to maturity and self-respecting independence. And the direct-to-video (DTV) narrative *Indecent Behavior* updates the gothic novel heroine to a sexually active post-feminist scenario in which erotic thrills are produced by the fear and lure of sexuality.

What's Love Got to Do with It entered the market on 9 June with high public consciousness of its story. Based on the tell-all autobiography *I, Tina* (1986), produced by Disney, and with logical tie-ins to CD music sales and live concert tours, the film was well positioned in the summer season, eventually grossing a respectable \$39.1 million. Its two leads, Angela Bassett and Laurence Fishburne, were subsequently nominated for Oscars. As with any well-known life story, the audience's principal

pleasure is in seeing a dramatic reenactment of "actual" (behind the scenes) events, and the basic story is predictable. On the basis of raw talent, a naive young woman begins a performing career. She blossoms professionally and is initially attracted to her driven and worldly mentor. But as time goes on, she comes to overshadow him professionally and in public acclaim, and he becomes jealous of her success. As he slides downward, his abuse gets more severe and meaner, while she reacts with denial and then terror to his violent outbursts. This naturally melodramatic narrative reaches its high point with Tina's escape, a tense and explosive sequence. Throughout, musical performance showcases Tina's expressive body and voice and provides the showcase for her talent and will. In contrast, Ike is driven to control her, but in performance she exceeds his grasp.

The film alternates public performance with domestic details, and the hard work of professional singing is matched by the hard work of trying to maintain the domestic sphere in a time of family disintegration. It opens with a rural black church choir rehearsing. Little Tina (Rae'Van Larrymore Kelly) has too much vocal and body energy for the gospel director, and she is ushered out to go home where she discovers that her mother is leaving her marriage and abandoning the kid to Grandma. Cut to 1958 and teenage Tina arrives in St. Louis to live with Mom and older sister while starting nursing school. But following her sister to the club where the older one works as a bartender, the country girl observes Ike Turner's band and the next night sings, immediately wowing the audience. The film displays the common trope of artist bio films, that all concerned immediately recognize her raw talent. Seen as a rival by Ike's common-law wife who threatens the singer with a gun but then shoots herself, Tina drops into the middle of another dysfunctional family. She is quickly seduced by Ike's pathetic admission of his fears that others always hurt him, don't believe in him, and will abandon him. She comforts him. This leads to her sexual initiation and (it is implied) to a new level of performance onstage when she sings "Rock Me Baby." Thus the pattern is set.

On tour the band has growing success, but Tina faces a punishing schedule. Even when she is ill, Ike puts her to work, and when she has a baby and is ordered to rest by the doctor, Ike carries Tina out of the hospital along with the infant so they can continue the tour schedule. Repeatedly, he torments her: following a rush marriage across the border in Mexico, he teasingly drives away while she tearfully runs to catch him. At their New York City premiere a sullen Tina resists by standing silent on stage. Ike approaches her from behind, kisses her cheek, and with tears streaming down her face, she performs a spectacular version of "A Fool in

Love." The framing and cutting emphasize (for the first time) her famous legs and strut. This scene can be read in two ways. In terms very familiar in the popular imagination, thanks to several decades of feminist interventions on spousal abuse, we see the familiar pattern of male abuse, female shock and intimidation, then male "apology," and the apparent (but unstable) resolution. But on another level, we see Tina actually resist the sadism by transmuting the humiliation into a higher level of performative expression. Pain advances her art.

While her attempts to run away from the abuse are frustrated (escaping on a bus, she is betrayed by her mother), Ike's humiliations are increasingly public, sadistic, and violent. He abuses drugs, and as Tina's star continues to rise he punishes her with a horrifying, violent rape, after which Tina overdoses on prescription drugs. Returned from the hospital, she bonds with a girlfriend. For the first time, she has someone she can trust. Tina is then introduced to Buddhism, which gives her calmness and self-assurance. She finally escapes Ike (her hysteria is visualized in shots of her running through dense street traffic) and sues for divorce. Her career blossoms as a solo act and his disintegrates. While the subject of battered women was firmly in the public consciousness by this time, the film can offer only an individual way out. It depicts no way to control or change violent masculine misogyny but simply dramatizes the need for the victim to get her act together, and then, if she is a talented international recording star, to take that act on the road. Surviving abuse is a solo act in the domestic sphere of neoliberal social policy. Thus this biopic validates individual solutions, matching the celebrity stardom of the performer.¹²

Another coming-to-self-awareness narrative, *Ruby in Paradise*, tells a white Appalachian woman's tale. Ruby (Ashley Judd, in her first major role) leaves her rural Tennessee home and drives to Panama City, Florida, on the "Redneck Riviera"—the low-rent Gulf Coast resort area at the end of the summer vacation season. She gets a retail job at Chambers, a souvenir and resort wear store, and starts a journal of her progress. Reflecting on her past, she confides to her co-worker girlfriend (Allison Dean) that she "got out without getting pregnant or beat up." From this minimal milestone, Ruby begins her new life. Admirably low-key in its approach, the film depicts the gradual awakening of her own consciousness and her expanding horizons as she encounters a caddish handsome guy (Bentley Mitchum), the store owner's son; finds a respectful Nice Guy (Todd Field), tender and romantic but with his own cynical negative energy; and begins to make her way as a self-respecting young single woman. Throughout this first year of being on her own, Ruby experiences novelties such as oysters,

a stylishly furnished high-rise apartment overlooking the ocean, and a Jane Austen novel, all with a sensible judgment. She makes up her own mind, measuring everything, and remains especially wary of the easy way out: depending on a man. When the bad-boy son tries to rekindle their brief affair by forcing himself on her, she resists and he fires her, precipitating a crisis of unemployment, a despairing job search, and finally hard physical labor in a commercial laundry service. Even in this phase she learns about herself and the world. Entering a topless strip bar at a low point in the job search in response to a "now hiring" sign, she sees a dancer working for the first time, realizes it isn't something she could do, and yet remains curious about the stripper so freely manipulating men with her physicality. And in the laundry she bonds with two women co-workers, appreciating their humor and quiet strength.

The film is especially remarkable in representing through cinematography and script writer-director Victor Nunez's ability to use place in an expressive way, matching the undramatic banality of a coastal resort town in its off season with the coming to consciousness of the protagonist. For Ruby, Panama City, a place her family visited when she was ten, and the only place she knew outside of Tennessee, did seem like Paradise in her dreams. Experiencing it as an adult, the romantic edge comes off, but her quiet optimism remains, strengthened when the boss takes her to Tampa for a trade show where she can see a wider world with new possibilities, including a young woman in a business suit with a briefcase who might be Ruby herself in the near future. Later, finding that her son lied about Ruby quitting, Mildred Chambers (Dorothy Lyman) rehires Ruby, getting her back on track. The neorealist drama ends affirmatively, recognizing that the economic and career possibilities of working-class women are often tied to their region.

Ruby in Paradise won the Grand Prize at the Sundance Festival and represents the best spirit of that institution: prizing the small, independent, character-driven psychological drama created by a writer-director-cinematographer auteur with an expressive cinematography, a sensitivity to regional locale, to class and gender politics, and to the gradual time of everyday personal change. At the same time, despite its award-winning status and high critical acclaim (Roger Ebert included it on his ten-best list for the year), the film could not turn the corner in distribution (handled by October Films, an art house niche specialist outfit), recouping only \$1.1 million, just a shade over its \$800,000 production cost. Nunez remains a remarkably talented auteur who is not well served by the dominant system, completing each successive film only after years of self-sacrifice.

Indecent Behavior represents a different take on the lone contemporary woman. In the noir tradition, the film depicts a detective investigating a murder and starting a sexual relation with a prime suspect; also in the noir pattern, it is heavily stylized with interiors infused with Venetian-blind shadows, even when there is no apparent light source. It is also indebted to the new sexiness of neo-noirs like *Body Heat* (1981) and borrows obviously from the box office success *Basic Instinct* (1992). Yet it is not a big-budget, mega star vehicle. Rather it is a competent but low-budget, direct-to-video production with small-scale stars: Shannon Tweed, a 1981 *Playboy* Playmate who often plays a sex therapist; Jan-Michael Vincent, remarkably stiff here, an aging has-been whose name appears on the video box but who trails the rest of the cast in the initial credits; and Gary Hudson as the cop, a dependable, handsome supporting actor with a long TV career. In short, the film is a soft-core erotic thriller, filling a reliable market niche. It's estimated that Tweed has enough of a following that her name will support sell-through of over 20,000 units and support late-night pay-cable viewing. While it's often assumed that these films target a voyeuristic male audience looking only for "T&A," in fact erotic thrillers have a substantial female audience, reflecting several decades of the sexual revolution and feminism making sexual/sexy dramas more socially acceptable.¹³ Yet these films typically not only show the lure but also spell out the danger, seeming in some ways like extensions of the Gothic novel, showing a caretaking woman alone and facing the tension of sexual fear.

Tweed plays Dr. Rebecca Mathis, a sex therapist who uses surrogates to help patients. Her marriage to Vincent is on the rocks, and her niece, a student training to be a therapist, is sleeping with hubby. Considerable time is spent with Rebecca and the niece observing the surrogates at work in (heterosexual and lesbian) sessions on the other side of a one-way mirror. The drug-induced death of a client following therapy provokes an investigation by detective Nick Sharkey, and then, after dinner in a nice romantic restaurant and her confession that "I'm fascinated by the edge," a warmly lit, long, conventionally tasteful lovemaking scene. Yet the peculiar characteristics of the soft-core thriller form don't provide the frisson of the detective being duped by a femme fatale, since we know from Tweed's star image that Rebecca is not a bad girl, but she can be stalked and framed for murder (by the surrogate who turns out to be a nut-case avenger). She willingly "proves" her innocence to Sharkey by taking the sex-enhancing drug and then having sex with him a second time (in a new location, however). As a genre, low-budget DTV erotic thriller movies mix mystery and sex with danger in a time when women, especially the educated professional women

who are the central characters, are supposed to have ready access to sex. The films are titillating but also modern-day Gothic tales, cautionary narratives indicating that for women pleasure and danger are always linked, in both the public and private spheres. Even a former Playmate, and even a sex therapist with a Ph.D., can find erotic pleasures a dangerous terrain in postmodernity. The erotic thriller (and this example is not outstanding cinematically or narratively, but is rather typical) exists at the intersection of industrial economics (the space and financing for modest-budget competent adult content) and a new audience segment (adult women open to decorous and tasteful soft-core porn).

Conclusion

What do we learn from taking a one-year cross-section of the dramatic feature film market in an age of global "free" markets? For the major studios, the industrial/financial logic of the blockbuster is overwhelming. Although film production is a high-risk affair, more like wild-cat oil drilling than competitive industrial manufacturing, it is also clear that the majors, through oligopoly and lobbying for direct government intervention, particularly on tariffs, trade, and copyright, try to moderate those variables overall. The post-Cold War opening of new global markets provided new opportunities and smoothed out the big picture. The need, domestic and international, for more "content" seemed, particularly with vastly overhyped media attention, to offer low-budget indie auteurs a window of opportunity. Everyone could be the next Quentin Tarantino, Robert Rodriguez, or Ang Lee. But most aspirants didn't want to consider the institutional and industrial constraints through the entire chain. In the brave new world of neoliberal filmmaking, new openings appeared, like an HBO realistic serial drama on a midwestern African American family, but the result was an interesting pilot, not a sustained series. A regional realist auteur like Victor Nunez could receive critical recognition, but his films were not marketable within the existing free-market system. In the era of neoliberalism, art must bow to commerce. Where there was an opening was in highly generic niche markets like erotic thrillers, which combine glossy (but low-cost) production values, "bankable" stars like Tweed who can turn a predictable sell-through, and a steady audience interest in a domestic viewing space. The year as a whole was witness to gradual but fundamental changes in high-tech production as well as theatrical and domestic exhibition, marketing, and overseas distribution. The entertainment business was profitable and would ride the rollercoaster along with

the bullish stock market. Cinema as art, expression, and social statement filled in the margins.

NOTES

1. Neoliberalism is the economic doctrine of unregulated "free" trade and markets, accompanied by downsizing the state and privatization of government services. With the end of the Cold War the doctrine has spread globally, espousing the view that unrestricted capital flows produce progress and abundance for all. Critics argue that neoliberalism is a new form of imperialism and that reduced government spending, taxation, and regulation results in greater inequality.

2. Wasko provides an excellent overview and analysis of the early 1990s situation. Authoritative data is found in Monush *Almanac 1994* and *Almanac 1995*. Detailed industry economic analysis appears in Acland; Corliss "There's Gold"; De Vany; Epstein; Gomery "Economic," "Hollywood Blockbuster," and "Hollywood Film Industry"; Hayes and Bing; Kleinhans "Independent"; Lewis "Following"; Menand; Miller et al.; "The Monster"; Perren; and Sanjek.

3. The number of screens soared due to a real estate development boom fueled by lower interest rates and mall developers who built new, smaller theater multiplexes to anchor their retail operations.

4. Hollywood considers all of North America a "domestic" market; a very profitable Canadian film such as *Porky's* (1982) is not foreign by this measure. *Like Water for Chocolate* was surpassed that year by *The Crying Game*, which opened in fall 1992 but had a long slow build (a Miramax strategy that opened it wide after Academy nominations), finally recouping \$62.5 million; *The Piano* opened in the United States late this year and quickly totaled \$40.1 million theatrical in North America. Of course with foreign films the distributor is not concerned with production cost and only bids on regional distribution rights.

5. Peter Biskind's *Down and Dirty Pictures* provides the essential (gossipy) story.

6. For a distinctly contrary political analysis, Richard Lippe reads *Philadelphia* as an impressive mass circulation political melodrama—the most progressive commercial film statement possible at the historical moment.

7. Epstein, "The Midas Formula" 236–41. Epstein's sure-fire characteristics are based on an analysis of 1999–2004 blockbusters, but the general outline applies to earlier works, most obviously the *Star Wars* franchise and most of Disney's major films.

8. The children end up the pursued in the most threatening sequence. Adults who weren't attentive to the PG-13 rating sometimes had unexpected experiences. For example, my Aunt Alice took her seven-year-old grandson Nicholas, a kid with a huge dinosaur fascination, to see the film. When Nick became terrified at the first T-Rex attack, they had to flee to the lobby, leaving behind brother Danny, age ten. When the film ended Danny emerged, saying he had wanted to leave the movie also but was too scared to get out of his seat. On the way out, Nick turned to Alice and plaintively asked, "Grandma, why did you take me to such a scary movie?"

9. Post-Fordism identifies the currently dominant mode of production exploiting new technologies, the globalizing of financial markets, the increase in the service and white-collar workforce at home, and the outsourcing of industrial production to the low-wage developing world. For an introduction, see Bourdieu; Harvey.

Reading *Jurassic Park* as visually complex character drama, Warren Buckland argues, in contrast, that "these set pieces are not autonomous action sequences (spectacles) but are narratologically motivated, serving to transform the main protagonist, enabling him to overcome his dislike of children" (185). See also Roger Beebe, who suggests that, like certain

other 1990s films, *Jurassic Park* initiates "a new model of narrative with a radically transformed role for digital effects. . . . The lack of a strong central (human) star . . . results in a . . . multiplication of narrative centers," for Beebe characteristic of "postmodern cinema" (171).

10. Although the point is not explicit in the film, Yolanda's success can remind us that the police, penal, and private security sectors are growth areas of the economy paralleling the decline in industrial employment and social welfare. And Rolanda's struggles fit the surging national drug problem in the wake of covert government protection for opium production in Southeast Asia during Vietnam, in Afghanistan during the fight against Soviet occupation, and in Central America with regard to the CIA's transportation and protection of drugs and dealers to pay for arms deals and support for the Contras, as well as failed attempts to prop up repressive Andean regimes against insurgents in coca regions.

11. Underlining the plot development's social foundation, following the banquet the wedding guests invade the bridal suite and insist not only that the couple drinks, but forces them under the bed covers and to remove their clothes before the party makers will depart. Thus the community gets the couple drunk and naked together. Intercourse follows from the guests' agenda.

12. For a contrasting musical bio film in which family and community form the essential basis of stardom, see my analysis of *Selena* (1997) (Kleinhans "Siempre").

13. For a full context of women consuming porn at home, see Juffer. Three excellent recent studies examine erotic thrillers in depth: Andrews; Martin *Encountering*; and Williams *Erotic*.

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In November, Democrats suffered a crushing defeat in the mid-term elections. Riding on voters' concerns over crime, taxes, and a general anti-incumbent sentiment, Republicans won control of both the House and the Senate for the first time in forty years. Led by Georgia congressman Newt Gingrich, the GOP promised increases in defense spending, cuts in taxes